



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region Three
1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

September 1, 2015

To: Governor's Office, Tim Baker, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office
Fisheries Division

Parks Division
Legal Unit

Lands Section
Wildlife Division

FWP Commissioners
Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103

MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624

Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771

Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624

Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701

Jack Atcheson, 2309 Hancock Avenue, Butte MT 59701

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725

Big Hole Watershed Committee, P.O. Box 931, Butte, MT 59703

Montana Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807

Dan Vermillion, FWP Commissioner, Livingston MT

Earnest and Colleen Bacon, 2215 Fishtrap Creek Road, Wisdom, MT 59761

Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, 730 N. Montana Street, Dillon, MT 59725-9424

George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 563, Butte, MT 59703

Skyline Sportsmen, P.O. Box 173, Butte, MT 59703

Anaconda Sportsmen, 2 Cherry, Anaconda, MT 59711

E.T. Bud Moran, Chairman CSKT, PO Box 278, Pablo, MT 59855

Al Lubeck, 2710 Amherst, Ave, Butte, MT 59701

Adam Rissien, ORV Coordinator, Wildands CPR, PO Box 7516, Missoula, MT 59807

Josiah Pinkham, Tribal Arch., Nez Perce Tribe, PO Box 365, Lapwai, ID 83540

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for a proposal to remove longnose and white suckers and brook trout from Van Houten Lake and restore native fish species including westslope cutthroat trout and Arctic grayling in the Big Hole River drainage in southwest Montana. The project includes building a fish migration barrier at the outlet of the lake, building spawning habitat between the lake and the barrier. Non-native brook trout are present in Van Houten Lake along with the two sucker species. The sucker species have resulted in poor fishing opportunity in Van Houten Lake, which is a popular recreational area. FWP attempted to improve the fishing by stocking burbot; however, the burbot introductions were not successful enough to have the desired effect of reducing sucker density. Multiple treatments may be necessary to eradicate existing fish in this small lake. Rotenone applied to the lake and the small inlet streams would be neutralized at the fish barrier using potassium permanganate preventing fish from being killed downstream of the proposed project area. FWP will stock the lake in the spring of 2016 with catchable-sized sterile

westslope cutthroat trout to provide for immediate fishing opportunity. Wild Arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout will be introduced over a three to five year period from wild sources in the Big Hole River drainage.

A total of 3 written comments were received.

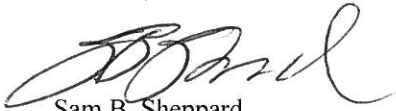
It is my decision to proceed with the proposed action to restore native fish to Van Houten Lake in the Big Hole drainage.

Questions regarding these Decision Notices should be mailed to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Van Houten Lake Native Fish Restoration
Attn: Jim Olsen
1820 Meadowlark Ln.
Butte, MT 59701

Or e-mailed to: jimolsen@mt.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Sheppard', is written over the printed name.

Sam B. Sheppard
Region Three Supervisor

Environmental Assessment for the Restoration of Native Fish in Van Houten Lake

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
September 1, 2015

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing a native fish restoration project in Van Houten Lake near Jackson, MT. The project includes building a fish migration barrier at the outlet of the lake, building spawning habitat between the lake and the barrier, removing brook trout, longnose suckers and white suckers using piscicide, and reintroduce Arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout. Non-native brook trout are present in Van Houten Lake along with the two native sucker species. The sucker species have resulted in poor fishing opportunity in Van Houten Lake, which is a popular recreational area. FWP attempted to improve the fishing by stocking burbot, a native predator of suckers; however, the burbot introductions were not successful enough to have the desired effect of reducing sucker density. Multiple treatments with the piscicide may be necessary to eradicate existing fish in this small lake. Rotenone applied to the lake and the small inlet streams would be neutralized at the fish barrier using potassium permanganate preventing fish from being killed downstream of the proposed project area. FWP will stock the lake in the spring of 2016 with catchable-sized sterile westslope cutthroat trout to provide for immediate fishing opportunity. Wild Arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout will be introduced over a three to five year period from wild sources in the Big Hole River drainage.

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on July 28th, 2015.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 30 days (through August 20th, 2015). The EA notice was mailed to 31 individuals and groups; legal notice was printed in the Montana Standard (Butte) newspaper and the Dillon Tribune. A draft EA was posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. Three written comments were received.

Comment 1. *Question, not a comment: The burbot and two species of suckers are native to Montana; the brook trout are not. Are there currently arctic grayling and Westslope cutthroat trout in this lake?*

Response: Arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout are not present in Van Houten Lake but they would have historically had access to the lake and therefore it is possible that historically they were present.

Comment 2. *Your project to remove brook trout and suckers and reintroduce grayling and west slope cutthroat trout is greatly appreciated. I am a residence of the area around Jackson and a former Landscape Architect for the USFS. I wanted to provide positive input...*

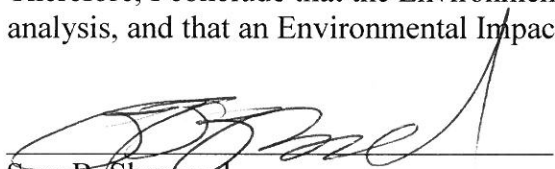
Response: No response necessary.

Comment 3. *Dear Fish Wildlife & Parks Commission, I support Alternate 2 for the removal of the longnose and white suckers from Lake Van Houten. The addition of the migration barrier and spawning habitat should be a great improvement for years to come.*

Response: No response necessary.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment and the public comments received, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision to go forward with the Proposed Action as outlined in the Draft Environmental Assessment. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Sam B. Sheppard
Region Three Supervisor
